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On Other Pages

WCC Delegation Returns from Cyprus Visit.	Page 2
South African Churchman Opposes Racial Law.	Page 3
New Anglican Province Set Up in East Africa	Page 4
National Refugee Committee Formed in US	Page 4
East Berlin Synod Backs Dibelius.	Page 4
Defence Ministry Prosecutes Niemöller	Page 5
Protestant Churches Closed in Spain	Page 5
In Brief.	Page 5

A Special Report

Mixed Reactions to General Council.	Page 7
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WCC Executive Committee Meets in Geneva, February 9 - 13

(Geneva) - The fourteen-member Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches will hold its semi-annual meeting on February 9 - 13 at the Geneva headquarters of the Council.

On the agenda will be a report from a two-man delegation to Cyprus. Bishop John Cullberg of the Church of Sweden and Dr. H.H. Wolf, director of the Council's Ecumenical Institute, left Geneva for Cyprus on January 27, after last summer's Central Committee "instructed the WCC's officers to arrange for a fraternal delegation to go to Cyprus to visit the authorities of the Church of Cyprus at the first appropriate moment and to report to the officers and to the WCC's Executive Committee on its conversations with them".

The recent decision of Pope John XXIII to convene a church council to study the question of Christian unity, a move termed of "special significance for the World Council" by its general secretary, Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, is also expected to be discussed.

Other items on the agenda include the General Secretary's report; a discussion of the proposed integration of the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council; relations with the Moscow Patriarchate of the

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Russian Orthodox Church; progress reports on two studies, one on religious liberty and one on proselytism; plans for a new headquarters building in Geneva, authorised by the Central Committee at its August meeting; preparation for the meeting of the Central Committee next summer on the island of Rhodes; and reports from the Council's staff.

The meeting is the group's first since the 90-member Central Committee met at Nyborg, Denmark, last August. The Executive Committee holds annual summer and winter meetings. It is elected by the Central Committee, the larger body which carries out World Council decisions made by the Assembly of the WCC at its meetings every six years.

Members of the committee are Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, Lutheran, USA, chairman of the Executive Committee; Dr. Ernest A. Payne, Baptist, United Kingdom, committee vice-chairman; Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, Presbyterian, USA; Dr. Kathleen Bliss, Anglican, United Kingdom; Archbishop Yngve Brilioth, Church of Sweden; the Rev. Peter K. Dagadu, Methodist, Ghana; Bishop Lakdasa De Mel, Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon, Ceylon; Professor Georges Florovsky, Orthodox, USA; Professor Josef L. Hromadka, Czech Brethren, Czechoslovakia; Metropolitan James of Philadelphia, Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Turkey; Dr. Martin Niemöller, Evangelical Church in Germany; Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, Methodist, USA; Mr. Rajaiah D. Paul, Church of South India; Dean Liston Pope, Congregationalist, USA.

In addition, the five presidents of the World Council sit with the committee. Expected to attend are Bishop Sante Uberto Barbieri, Methodist, Argentina; Bishop Otto Dibelius, Evangelical Church in Germany; and the Rt. Rev. Henry Knox Sherrill, Episcopalian, USA. The other two presidents are the Metropolitan Juhanon Mar Thoma, Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, South India; and the Very Rev. John Baillie, Church of Scotland.

Staff members will include the WCC's general secretary, Dr. Visser 't Hooft and Dr. Roswell P. Barnes, WCC executive secretary in the United States. Sir Kenneth Grubb of London, chairman of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs; Dr. Norman Goodall, secretary of the Joint Committee of the International Missionary Council and the WCC; and Dr. George Carpenter and the Rev. Ronald K. Orchard of the IMC are expected.

EPS, Geneva

WCC Delegation Returns from Cyprus Visit

(Geneva) - In accordance with a resolution adopted by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches at its meeting in August 1958, two delegates of the Council, Bishop John Cullberg of Sweden and Dr. H.H. Wolf, director of the Ecumenical Institute, have paid a fraternal visit to the Church of Cyprus.

During their four-day visit they were received by the bishops of the Church of Cyprus, visited several parishes and church institutions and attended an ordination service. They were impressed by the loyalty of the people to the church and their strong desire for the return of Archbishop Makarios. They were allowed to visit five priests who are in prison. The delegation visited the Archdeacon representing the Church of England and also met the governor of Cyprus.

Bishop Cullberg and Dr. Wolf will report to the WCC's Executive Committee at its meeting in Geneva next week.

EPS, Geneva

South African Churchman Opposes Racial Law

(Cape Town) - "Injustices" to the South African Indian population are threatened to result from a new amendment to the Group Areas Act, according to Professor Ben J. Marais of South Africa's Dutch Reformed Church and author of the well-known book, "The Colour Problem and the West".

One of several amendments which have been proposed to the nine-year old act would make it necessary for Indian businessmen to leave their commercial property located in non-Indian quarters. The act provides for "exclusive racial areas".

The eviction plan, Dr. Marais said, "embraces old established trading rights and sites involving millions of pounds sterling which the Indian group has built up, in many instances, over 60 years".

Does the Christian Church," he asked, "remain silent in the face of this? Should it be pacified with the assurance that a measure of postponement will be considered while a series of all-embracing proposals hangs like the shadow of death over a group of fellow-men for whom, and for whose children, hunger, pain and fear mean precisely what they mean to us?"

Dr. Marais said he had "sufficient faith in the Dutch Reformed Church to believe we will not sit still while injustice is taking place". EPS, Geneva

World Refugee Year Hailed By Church Leaders

(Geneva) - Protestant and Roman Catholic voluntary agencies have "great hopes" for the 1959 World Refugee Year, being sponsored by the United Nations.


Speaking at last week's meeting in Geneva of the 25-nation executive committee of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the representatives urged action by national branches of the voluntary agencies.

At the sessions, Dr. Elfan Rees, advisor on refugee affairs to the World Council of Churches, pledged the full support of member bodies of the WCC and cited appeals received on behalf of 10,000 Tibetan refugees in Nepal and 5,000 stateless Syrians in Lebanon. He welcomed the public attention centred on refugee problems by the "Year", and said, "Since the wave of sympathy for the Hungarian refugees subsided these forgotten people are feeling more 'left behind' than ever. I am afraid help to refugees is timeless, but it is also a race against time." EPS, Geneva

Survey Shows Lutheran Colleges Accept All Races

(Milwaukee) - Lutheran colleges and theological seminaries in the United States and Canada "reflect a wholesome and agreeable atmosphere" in race relations, according to a survey made public during the 41st annual meeting of the National Lutheran Council this week in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The survey shows that 56 of the denomination's 64 colleges and seminaries do not practise racial or cultural discrimination. Nine institutions have an official policy against discrimination, while 49 report that their practices are based on common acceptance. EPS, Geneva



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New Anglican Province Set Up in East Africa

(Dodoma) - A new province of the Anglican Church in Africa is going to be set up in East Africa as a result of consultations just ended at Dodoma, in Tanganyika.

The new province, which will have its own archbishop and be completely independent, will cover Kenya and Tanganyika. One of the chief problems facing the province will be the need to recruit educated young Africans for the ministry. So far, full-time service in the church has failed "to attract college and university educated Africans".

Commenting on the future of the Anglican church in Africa, Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury, has said that it is no longer possible for "adequate jurisdiction and control to be exercised from England". Last summer's Lambeth Conference endorsed the new move and Anglican sources say it is expected that similar proposals will be made later for Uganda and the Upper Nile areas.

EPS, Geneva

National Refugee Committee Formed in US

(New York) - A United States Committee for Refugees has been set up, with the Very Rev. Francis B. Sayre Jr., dean of the Washington Cathedral, as chairman.

Speaking at the committee's New York office last week, Dean Sayre said the heightened American concern for refugees in Europe, the Middle East and the Far East, had led to the formation of the private committee. He said that the group will "inform the American public on current refugee issues, consult regularly with Administration and Congressional leaders, endeavour to stimulate research on refugee problems and maintain close liaison with American voluntary agencies carrying on refugee activities here and abroad". The committee is expected to play a leading role in planning US participation in the World Refugee Year, being sponsored by the United Nations.

President of the committee is Mr. Harper Sibley, a former chairman of Church World Service, relief arm of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.

EPS, Geneva

East Berlin Synod Backs Dibelius

(Berlin) - A special East Berlin meeting of the synod of the Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg has declared confidence in Berlin's Bishop Otto Dibelius and in Pastor Kurt Scharf, the president of the Evangelical Church of the Union in Germany. Both men have been strongly criticized by the DDR Communist Government.

Discussion of new orders of confirmation and public worship marked the synod, which followed other East German churches in separating attendance at confirmation classes from subsequent attendance at first communion services. The synod decided that confirmation candidates who have been through the Communist state-sponsored youth dedication ceremony should be held back from first communion for at least a year after the end of their confirmation classes.

It was decided to send a letter to parents of confirmation candidates asking them to treat the new rules with sympathetic understanding and pointing out that confirmation and the youth dedication are basically incompatible.

A new order of public worship was accepted by a large majority in spite of some criticism, but the order adopted still has to be approved by the synod of the whole Evangelical Union Church later in February. EPS, Geneva

Defence Ministry Prosecutes Niemöller

(Wiesbaden, Germany) - Dr. Martin Niemöller, president of the Church of Hesse-Nassau, may be prosecuted by the Defence Ministry of the West German government. The threat to prosecute follows press reports that he had defamed the German military forces at a meeting in Kassel by referring to the training of soldiers for specialised commands as "a finishing school for professional criminals".

Pastor Niemöller denied having made the statements attributed to him. In a statement he expressed regret that the legal proceedings have been instituted on the basis of an unchecked press report. He said that he had referred in his speech to the training of commando units in World War II, who were posted on all fronts for sabotage and work behind the enemy lines.

Franz Josef Strauss, the West German Defence Minister, wrote to leaders of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) asking them to dissociate themselves from Martin Niemöller's alleged statement. Bishop Otto Dibelius of Berlin, as president of the EKD, pointed out that Niemöller had himself denied having made the statement and that in any case he spoke personally, not for the churches. "It is certain", Dr. Dibelius told Mr. Strauss, "that no responsible body of the EKD is going to associate itself with the alleged statement, nor condone it".

Dr. Eugen Gerstenmaier, Protestant speaker of the lower house in the West German parliament, also informed Mr. Strauss that the EKD did not assume responsibility for all statements of its members or office-bearers. EPS, Geneva

Protestant Churches Closed in Spain

(Madrid) - Three Baptist churches in Barcelona have been closed by the police.

The largest of the three, at Calle Verdi, is a new structure, opened recently because the church building used up to that time was too small for the congregation. The police refused to accept the opening of an additional church building.

A second church at Pueblo Nuevo, which had been reconstructed after being destroyed in the civil war, and more recently, the Baptist Church at Turo de la Peira, have also been shut down.

In Madrid a Baptist pastor who failed to obey police orders for the closing of his church is due to come before the courts. EPS, Geneva

In Brief

Expansion of the Philippine Lutheran Church and increased Filipinization of its clergy will be the major emphasis of the church during the next two years, according to action taken at the church's biennial convention in Baguio City in mid-January. Mr. Alvaro Judan, a Manila layman, was named treasurer, the first Filipino to be elected to an administrative post. The church has 2,600 adult members and 20 missionaries.

A feature-length film on the plight of Christians living in East Germany will probably be the next joint film venture of the Lutheran church groups that produced "Martin Luther". According to Robert E. A. Lee, executive secretary of Lutheran Film Associates, a screenplay on documented incidents involving both pastors and laymen has been approved by the board of directors of Lutheran Film Associates. Cost of the film is estimated at \$400,000, about the same as the investment in "Martin Luther".

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A group of 150 young Americans will go on an African tour in 1960 to help promote better understanding between North America and Africa. Sponsor of the tour will be Dr. James H. Robinson, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of the Master in New York. Dr. Robinson led a similar intercredal and interracial group of 60 American students this summer to Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and the French Cameroons.

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A Bible illustration contest will be held this summer, in connection with a Conference on Bible Illustration, planned for Edinburgh, Scotland. Information about the world-wide contest, which closes on March 31, is available from the Secretary of the National Bible Society of Scotland, 5 St. Andrew Square, Edinburgh.

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The United Society for Christian Literature has just made a grant to the Christian Council of Ethiopia to help meet the cost of issuing 10,000 copies of a revised Amharic edition of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress", described as one of the most popular books in Ethiopia.

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The Board of Missions of the Methodist Church in the United States has given its approval to the proposed merger of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches. "We anticipate", the board said, "that the detailed plan of organization of the newly constituted council will express the concern of the churches for both mission and unity."

* *

American missionaries of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, working in the Philippine Lutheran Church, have drawn up a statement to be presented to their church's next convention, pleading "with our Christian friends in the US to assist missionaries in foreign countries in their work by praying and working for better relations, and to prevail upon their fellow Americans, also in this matter of integration, to obey the law of the land and to apply the law of love".

* *

The Synod of the Reformed Church of Algeria has sent an urgent appeal to all the Protestants in the country, urging them to use every opportunity to preach the Christian message to the Moslems. It also expressed the hope that the young Protestants of Algeria and France would assume responsibility for needed educational and social work in Algeria.

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A new Protestant broadcasting station "Ondas de Luz" ("Waves of Light"), has been started in Managua, the capital of Nicaragua. The funds for constructing it were given by Protestants in Nicaragua.

EPS, Geneva

A Special ReportMixed Reactions to General Council

(Geneva) - The calling of a general council of the Roman Catholic Church by the Pope appears to have come as a surprise even to highly placed officials in the Vatican.

The "Osservatore Romano", Vatican newspaper, devoted considerable space to reports of the Pope's sermon in a service preceding the announcement on January 25 (see EPS No. 4), but gave only a short item to the much more important statement announcing the council, which was made in the presence of a group of cardinals only. Although the "Osservatore" devoted long news space and comment to the Pope's sermon, there was no immediate comment on the calling of the council.

The text of the Pope's announcement as published in "Osservatore" does not confirm the first impression that the summons to the general council to deal with unity envisages the sending of invitations to non-Roman Catholic churches, but suggests that the council should itself issue the invitation to the "separated communities" to find the way back to unity.

Editorial comment in the "Osservatore Romano" was delayed until February 1, when the paper took issue with journalists for having pictured the council in political terms as an attempt to achieve unity "out of fear of communism". Emphasizing that unity would not be sought out of fear, but through charity, the editorial said: "The coming council will not be the council of fear, but the council of unity through the love of all Christians".

The "Osservatore's" article went on to say that the Pope had not spoken of any "sins of the church" but of "the sins of Catholics who must admit they have not prayed enough for God to open the way to unity, nor felt charity toward their separated brothers; they have preferred sharp and combative dispute to love that is full of patience, the pitiless austerity of the teacher to the loving serenity of a St. Francois de Sales. We have been satisfied with our dogmatic certainties without feeling the need of sharing these certainties with our brothers", says the church paper's comment.

Meanwhile, first excited reactions in the non-Roman Catholic Christian world have tended to give way to more sober analysis of what the council might mean in terms of further progress in the ecumenical movement.

Official Roman Catholic newsagency reports and broadcasts of the Vatican Radio tend to take a conciliatory and hopeful tone toward Eastern Orthodoxy and especially to hope that the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople will respond favourably to the Pope's initiative. However, there is no clarification of the intention to invite or not to invite Orthodox bishops to take part.

The Orthodox Patriarchates of Constantinople and Antioch, and the Church of Greece have withheld official comment for the time being. A spokesman for the Church of Greece emphasized that on issues of such importance the lead of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople would be followed and that only the Ecumenical Patriarch could call the autocephalous Orthodox churches together to consider possible reactions.

A Moscow Patriarchate representative said that comment must wait on study of the text of the Pope's statement.

Other voices, notably that of Professor Hamilcar Alivisatos, well known Greek Orthodox theological teacher in Athens, stress the difficulty that would be felt by the Orthodox churches in accepting an invitation. It is pointed out that such a meeting could not be regarded as "ecumenical" in the Orthodox sense of the word, since it would not have the same character as the seven councils accepted as ecumenical in the Orthodox world. Caution is also voiced because attendance might seem to imply acceptance of the Roman primacy.

In Italy itself Pastor Roberto Comba of the Waldensian Protestant minority has said: "All Italian Protestants rejoice that finally the Roman Catholic Church has entered the ecumenical path along which Protestant communities have been proceeding for many years". Pastor Comba asked that "certain aspects of intolerance and vexation should cease, particularly in Italy, Spain and Colombia, because they seem incompatible with new Vatican trends", but he declared that "the new Pope's attitude might open a new phase in the relationship between the various Christian confessions".

Comment in French-speaking Europe has tended to rove more widely over possible reasons behind the calling of the general council. An editorial in the Geneva weekly "La Vie Protestante" regards the Pope's appeal as an expression of the widespread and growing concern for Christian unity everywhere. "Today it is no longer possible, no matter what denomination one belongs to, to evade the constraining appeal of this spiritual imperative", says the editorial. "It belongs explicitly to the Gospels. The fruits of prayer for unity are beginning to ripen".

"La Vie Protestante" also asks whether the Pope's action might not be due to some extent to the meeting at Utrecht, Netherlands, last August, between representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church and of the World Council of Churches. "Might there be some disquiet at Rome on account of a drawing together, which, if it were to be strengthened, might diminish the prospects of an eventual "return" of Eastern Orthodoxy to the bosom of Rome?" the editorial says.

Professor Jean Bosc, writing in the Paris Protestant weekly "Réforme" says that "it is not to be expected that the Roman Catholic Church will surrender its view of itself as the One Church. But it might at least bring the Roman authorities to recognise officially what some members of the Catholic Church have already discovered - that the problem of church unity has also another dimension, of which the World Council of Churches is the sign".

An article in the Paris daily "Le Figaro", signed by Vladimir d'Ormesson, a former French ambassador to the Vatican, speaks of the possibility of creating a new "climate of faith and love" between Christians at the council. Referring to difficulties encountered by Orthodox Christians behind the iron curtain and by Protestants in Roman Catholic countries, the article suggests that the council might lead to recognition of a form of "Christian charity" that will increase religious liberty.

Similar welcome mixed with caution marked statements issued by Anglican and free church leaders in the United Kingdom; the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, declined to comment until he had seen the Pope's full announcement.

Dr. Edwin Dahlberg, president of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States, said on receiving the news of the Pope's announcement: "Anything that would be a step toward unity of churches would be welcome", but he warned that "it would have to be recognised that it was a mutual coming together, not under conditions laid down by one church for all the others. Any movement toward unity cannot be looked upon by Protestants as separated Christians returning to the Church of Rome", he said, but added: "Anything that would bring together all the churches of Christ would be blessed of God".

In Germany Dr. Wolfgang Sucker, director of the Institute of Confessional Studies at Bensheim, in Hesse, has said that the call to deeper unity is mainly aimed by the Pope at the Eastern Churches. Dr. Sucker points to Pope John's twenty-year residence in Eastern European countries and his concern for the Orthodox Church. However, Dr. Sucker thinks it unlikely that the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, in spite of his irenic approach to the problem of the East-West schism, could accept the terms on which his cooperation in the council would be sought.

Bishop Hanns Lilje of Hanover said he regarded the invitation of the Pope as being addressed to the Orthodox. He expressed doubt about inclusion of Protestants.

The trend of most comment now seems to indicate that further non-Roman Catholic reaction waits on fuller clarification from the Vatican of the composition and procedures of the forthcoming meeting, which, according to many Roman Catholic news sources, may not now be held until 1961. EPS, Geneva

